

Men and Women in the Afterlife

Riffat Hassan

It is commonly believed that in the afterlife righteous men will be rewarded by God and given beautiful female companions (“*hur*”). This belief is based on a reading of the following Qur’anic passages:

Verily, the God-conscious will find themselves (on that Day) in gardens and in bliss ... (And they will be told) “Eat and drink with good cheer as an outcome of what you were wont to do, reclining on couches (of happiness) ranged in rows!” And (in that paradise) We shall mate them with Companions pure, most beautiful of eye (Surah 52: *At-Tur*: 17-20)

Immortal youths will wait upon them with goblets, and ewers, and cups filled with water from unsullied springs by which their minds will not be clouded and which will not make them drunk; and with fruit of any kind that they may choose, and with the flesh of any fowl that they may desire. And (with them will be their) companions, pure, most beautiful of eye, like unto pearls (still) hidden in their shells. (And this will be) a reward for what they did (in life) (Surah 56: *Al-Waqi’ah*: 15-26)

Explicating the term “*hur*,” Muhammad Asad has stated: “The noun ‘*hur*’... is a plural of both ‘*ahwar*’ (masculine) and ‘*hawra*’ (feminine), either of which describes a person distinguished by ‘*hawar*’ which primarily denotes ‘intense whiteness of the eyeballs and lustrous black of the iris’ (*Qamus*). In a more general sense, ‘*hawar*’ signifies simply whiteness (*Asas*) or, as a moral qualification, purity. Hence the compound expression ‘*hur*’*in*’ signifies, approximately, ‘pure beings (or, more specifically, ‘companions pure’) most beautiful of eye’ (the latter is the meaning of ‘*in*’ (the plural of ‘*a’yan*’). In his comments (on this expression) Razi observes that inasmuch as a person’s eye reflects his soul more clearly than any other part of the human body, ‘*in*’ may be understood as ‘rich of soul’ or ‘soulful’.”

Most Muslims believe that the “*hur*” mentioned in the Qur’an are females who will be bestowed by God upon the righteous males in paradise. It is important to note here that in Surah 52: *At-Tur*: 20 and Surah 44: *Ad-Dukhan*: 53 the term “*zawwaj*” is used in conjunction with “*hur*.” Since the term “*zawj*” is generally interpreted as referring to a wife, it is commonly assumed by Muslim men that the “*hur*” are heavenly counterparts to their earthly wives. In this context the following statement by Muhammad Asad is relevant: “As regards the term ‘*hur*’ in its current feminine connotation, quite a number of the earliest Qur’an commentators, among them Al-Hasan al-Basri, understood it as signifying no more and no less than ‘the righteous among the women of the human kind’ (Tabari) – ‘even those toothless old women of yours whom God will resurrect as new beings’ (Al-Hasan, as quoted by Razi).”

Despite the common association of “*hur*” with females, the fact that the term “*hur*” is plural and refers to both males and females must be kept in mind. What the Qur’an has stated in the above-cited passages is that reward given by God to righteous women in the afterlife is identical to the reward given by God to righteous men in the afterlife. That righteous women are offered a similar reward in the afterlife by God is not known to most Muslims and is likely to shock those who consider men’s superiority to women, both in this world and in the next, as self-evident.

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